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**NETWORKED ECONOMIC VALUE CREATION IN EVENT TOURISM, AN  
EXPLORATORY STUDY OF TOWNS AND SMALLER CITIES IN THE UK**

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EVENT MANAGEMENT

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of networks in generating economic value for event tourism in towns and smaller cities in the UK. While networks have been shown to create a wide range of value, research in this context is limited and little is understood of if or how economic value is generated. The lens used in this study was the value creating side of the business model canvas with local government organisations as the focal node examining the flow of economic value from partners, activities and resources. There were survey responses from 112 different town and city organisations across the UK. The study found that only the ‘activities’ element of the network contributed significantly to creating economic value in an event tourism context. The network components of ‘partners’ and ‘resources’ were not on their own significant to the creation of economic value. The outcomes of this paper suggest that practitioners in towns and cities should strategise their engagement with local networks through a formal event tourism strategy that clearly defines how they operationalise engagement activities within that network in order to facilitate economic value creation. In addition, the paper raises questions around what resources are needed at the focal node (local government organisations) in order to maximise the economic value created by the network.

**Keywords:** Event tourism; Economic value creation; Business model canvas; Networks

## INTRODUCTION

This article aims to explore how towns and smaller cities in the UK draw economic value from their event networks. Whilst the definitions of ‘value’ in an events context vary widely, this study covers the economic value generated for event tourism only. It follows calls from Ziakas (2019) and Getz and Page (2016) to further explore the economic value of event portfolios and the role in which networks play in their creation and management. In addition, Richards and Colombo (2017a) suggest that more attention be paid to the network value derived by organisations from events, both locally and globally. This study answers these calls for further exploration through an empirical exploratory study of how economic value is created for event tourism in towns and smaller cities, using the value creating side of the business model canvas as a lens (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

While many towns and smaller cities can use traditional tourism assets such as landscapes, culture, heritage or leisure pursuits to attract events (Crouch, 2010; Dwyer & Kim, 2003), others lack the infrastructure required to win event business (Stokes, 2006). Despite these challenges, many towns and smaller cities increasingly seek to compete on the same platform as the major cities, using events for economic outcomes or regeneration (Turok, 2009). From an economic perspective, these towns and smaller cities see events as a route to enhancing or encouraging tourism footfall (Getz, 2008), placemaking (Richards & Colombo, 2017b) destination marketing (Chalip & Costa, 2005) or regeneration (Duignan, 2013; Smith, 2010).

A review of the literature indicates that previous knowledge surrounding the creation of networked economic value within this context is limited, particularly when the focus is on places with fewer internal or top-down resources (Turok, 2009). Smaller places may lack the political vision or dedicated event expertise needed to develop a top-down event strategy or an effective

event portfolio. Therefore, developing an event-related network could increase the potential for value creation, increased eventfulness and sustainability in supporting an event tourism strategy (Getz, 2017). The business model concept has attracted a lot of attention as a potential tool for analysing value creation in networks (Bocken, Short, Rana, & Evans, 2013; Nailer & Buttriss, 2019; Nenonen & Storbacka, 2010; Perić, Vitezić, & Mekinc, 2019). This paper applies the business model concept to the context of UK towns and small cities of varying size and event-potential.

The data collection was focused on the Association of Town and City Management (ATCM), a not-for-profit association that represents 250 organisations involved in the leadership of towns and smaller cities in UK (ATCM, 2018). It was used as the basis for purposive sampling of cities for a quantitative survey, given its members are predominantly working in the context of events and regeneration of UK town and city centres (Saunders, Thornhill, & Lewis, 2016).

This study shifts the focus of economic value creation in events away from the major cities that are prevalent in the literature. Previously, the study of towns and smaller cities has been mainly limited to a case study approach (Moscardo, 2007; Piazzzi & Harris, 2016). For example, Alves, Cerro, & Martins, (2010) demonstrated the importance and impacts of small rural tourism events and Fountain & Mackay, (2017) describe the role of a rural festival in placemaking for the small town of Akaroa in New Zealand. Placemaking was a key feature in the work by Buultjens & Cairncross (2015) who looked at events in destinations across remote areas in Australia. All of these works focus on a case study approach and a single or small number of events, rather than considering event tourism strategy as a whole.

This focus on multiple towns and small cities is particularly important because the findings of this study are useful for practitioners (such as the ATCM) to understand the wider issues of event value creation. This paper seeks to provide an understanding of how economic value could be drawn from a network of partners, resources and activities in places with a limited resource base.

### **Economic Value from Event Tourism**

There has been much research interest in the economic planning and management of event tourism and event portfolios (Hall, 1992; Ziakas, 2018; Ziakas & Trendafilova, 2018). Events and events tourism have been seen as an animator of place in major destinations (Richards, 2017b), supporting destination attractiveness and branding (Jago, Chalip, Brown, Mules, & Ali, 2003). Mattson (2005) describes the concept of economic boosterism within a destination, while authors such as Arnegger & Herz (2016) and Kennelly (2017) show that events can also become attractions in their own right and contribute to destination marketing outcomes. Research by Connell, Page, & Meyer (2015) also demonstrates the critical relationship that exists between events as a bridge between the market for visitor attractions created by tourists and the use of events to boost off-peak tourism demand (Getz & Page, 2016). In towns and smaller cities, there may be less reasons for tourists to visit: fewer visitor attractions, less of a reputation for cultural heritage, a lack of landscape, and so events can help generate or sustain a tourism system (Weidenfeld & Leask, 2013). Another key economic benefit from events is that they can become a unique selling proposition for the town or city that will help to differentiate it from the competition (Mazanec, Wöber, & Zins, 2007; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). The challenge that towns and smaller cities face is developing a sustainable competitive advantage over major cities as well (Getz, 2013). Towns and smaller cities are also

difficult entities to manage and market, due to the complexity of the relationships of local stakeholders (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). Additionally, if a town or city has limited resources it may not be able to successfully leverage the range of events in its location, given the other internal competition for public funding (Kearns & Turok, 2000). Dredge & Whitford (2011) suggest that challenges include budget constraints, compressed and inflexible timelines, cycles of resourcing and complex public-private interest structures. Those responsible for events at a local level may not have specific skills, qualifications or experience which would help them to understand the wider benefits that leveraging event tourism may bring. Because of these complexities, there is a need for a different approach to harnessing place-based relationships and resources.

One potential perspective is a bottom-up approach to event tourism where, Getz (2008, 2013) argues, economic sustainability is increased through stakeholder collaboration in events, which may lever wider competitive advantage and develop a more sustainable economic position. There is also the potential for mixing top-down and bottom-up approaches. Indeed, Stokes (2008) reviewed a range of event tourism strategies from community orientation to corporate orientation, with an idealised synergistic point in the centre. With this in mind, a collaborative (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999) approach would seem an appropriate strategy to tap into a network of resources. Collaborative engagement has been documented in a variety of event contexts; large cities like Glasgow (Schofield, Crowther, Jago, Heeley, & Taylor, 2018); smaller self-contained islands (Dickson, Milne, & Werner, 2017); the regeneration of urban areas (Christie & Gibb, 2015; Panyik, Costa, & Rátz, 2011) and more widely in tourism planning and destination marketing (Fyall & Garrod, 2005; Fyall, Garrod, & Wang, 2012; Malek & Costa, 2014). The mechanism of collaboration requires networks to be created and utilised, particularly

for value creation (Arnaboldi & Spiller, 2011; Hede & Stokes, 2009; Orefice, 2018). Moscardo (2007) produced a conceptual framework of regional development through events and festivals and concluded that community involvement contributed to better event outcomes and to regional development in general.

The economic value of event tourism to towns and small cities is not in doubt, but limited resources and management structures may limit the value created. This is a particular challenge in the current climate of local authority austerity (Lowndes & Pratchett, 2012). A wider approach and understanding of how value creation happens through a local network would therefore carry some merit.

### **Network Value Creation in Towns and Smaller Cities**

For towns and small cities, value creation through an event tourism programme generally supports economic outcomes (Taks, Chalip, & Green, 2015; Wallstam, Ioannides, & Pettersson, 2018; Wood, 2009). There have been significant moves towards a more social value approach to events (Deery & Jago, 2010; Fredline, Jago, & Deery, 2003; Wallstam et al., 2018), which we acknowledge warrants future research effort. However, economic impact is often seen as the most important and visible form of value (Richards & Colombo, 2017a), and so this is the focus this paper adopts. Nenonen & Storbacka (2010) suggest that value creation is one of the core elements of all business models. However, they point out that the term customer value creation is discussed under a variety of different terms such as “value creation design, “value proposition” or “create value”. For the purposes of clarity, this paper adopts the terms “create value” or “value creation”, which are seen as encompassing all of the terms listed above. More specifically, “economic value creation” is defined as an increase in economic return for a town or small city from its event network.



From an event tourism perspective, networks of actors facilitate the value creation process (Cabiddu, Lui, & Piccoli, 2013) of events, which makes these networks very important in any event tourism strategy (Stokes, 2006). Ziakas (2018) proposed a model for a network perspective of planning, managing and leveraging event portfolios. This model emphasised the importance of stakeholder interactions and exchanges in forming a collaborative network. In this respect, the interest and resources contributed by different actors in the network can be tied together to support event programmes, but this requires that these relationships be well managed and shaped by a lead organisation to ensure economic value is created effectively by the network.

### **Value Creating Networks**

Within the concept of value creating networks, Gummerus (2013) suggests there are two streams in creating value. The first stream is the input value creation process which includes all the partners, activities and resources. The second stream is the outcome of that value creation process, which considers how the different stakeholders in the network recognise the benefits of the value created. Several authors have highlighted the importance of a network of stakeholders or actors in facilitating event value creation (Chesbrough, 2002; Gummerus, 2013; Massa, Tucci, & Afuah, 2017; Orefice, 2018). Similarly, the definition of a value network given by Allee (2009, p. 429) is “purposeful group of people or organizations creating social and economic good through complex dynamic exchanges of tangible and intangible value”. This definition emphasises the role of key actors (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010) in value creation within a value network (Agrawal & Rahman, 2015; Chesbrough, 2002). Key actors must build a relationship with each other (Håkansson & Olsen, 2012) to exchange and integrate resources and competencies to produce value (Greer, Lusch, & Vargo, 2016; Merz, He, & Vargo, 2009;

Orefice, 2018; Pera, Occhiocupo, & Clarke, 2016). Scott (2008) also suggests that value is created through generated rules, norms and beliefs of the actors in the network.

In this review of the literature, economic value creation processes in towns and small cities are shown to be complex and wide in scope. In order to provide focus for this exploratory study, the business model concept is used as a lens to map out the flow of value created by event tourism networks.

### **Business Models**

The business model concept highlights how organisations create and capture value through their activities (Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2011). The concept has become increasingly important in management research in recent years (Massa, Viscusi, & Tucci, 2018) and as (Chesbrough, 2007) noted, “Every company has a business model, whether they articulate it or not. At its heart, a business model performs two important functions: value creation and value capture”. Past research of business models shows how the different actors in the network influence the business model design and how the business model is viewed as a boundary-spanning activity system, not just limited to a focal organisation like local government (Doganova & Eyquem-Renault, 2009; Massa et al., 2017; Wirtz, Pistoia, Ullrich, & Göttel, 2016; Zott & Amit, 2010). Zott et al. (2011) suggest this has also led to increasing research interest in how networks of actors influence mechanisms of value creation or capture. Organisations involved in event tourism who are designing, or innovating business models should take into consideration their network of stakeholders, since they influence their value creation process (Massa et al., 2018; Zott et al., 2011). In event tourism, the question posed is how these different networks of actors, activities and resources influence the value proposition of the business model (i.e., economic value) and the creation of value within that.

The business model challenges the traditional view of economic value being limited to a single source and proposes a more networked view of value creation activity. Changes to the business model occur as the stakeholders offer different approaches to creating, delivering and capturing value to meet the requirements of all the stakeholders involved (Massa, Tucci & Afuah et al., 2017; Nosratabadi et al., 2019; Oskam, Bossink, & de Man, 2018). Similarly, in an event, stakeholders co-construct value in the form of relationships and distributed knowledge before, during and, more importantly, after an event has taken place (Colombo & Richards, 2017). There are potential synergies between the value-creating business model concept and the ideas of bottom-up event tourism, which usually involves local communities as partners developing their own events (Dredge & Whitford, 2010; Getz, 2008; Timur & Getz, 2008). Therefore, mapping the event tourism offer in a town or city through the lens of the business model is a new concept, which offers the opportunity to understand the inner workings of the networks driving event tourism, even in the absence of a direct strategy or policy for event generation. Previous work on event tourism networks (Stokes, 2006) in Australian regional development agencies showed that value networks could influence event tourism strategy.

The Business Model Canvas (BMC) by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) is one of many business models described in recent literature. There has been an increasing interest in the application of the business model canvas to highlight network value creation in services and products (Ojasalo & Ojasalo, 2018). The BMC seeks to illustrate the key areas of a business where value is generated and how it contributes towards a final value proposition. Nenonen & Storbacka (2010) suggest this is a useful lens to help illustrate how towns and smaller cities can generate networked value for their event tourism strategy. The core of this perspective is how the key resources and key activities are shared among the network of actors and how the complex

partnerships are managed in order to co-create value (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; Pera et al., 2016).

### **Event Tourism Value Creating Elements**

The BMC consists of nine building blocks that are represented on a one-page canvas (Figure 1) and is the basis of the approach used in this study to examine economic network value creation. In the centre of the canvas sits the value proposition, to the left the value creating elements: key resources, key activities and key partnerships. To right are external value consuming elements: customer relationships, channels and customer segments. Straddling both sides are financial elements: cost structure and revenue streams. It would be perfectly feasible to map all nine elements to the event tourism provision in any given town or city as it has been proven to be applicable in a service-dominant environment (Ojasalo & Ojasalo, 2018). However, for the purposes of this study, only the three internal elements of key partners, key activities and key resources are used. The justification for this is that this side of the canvas measures the flow of value created into the focal organisation, and which then facilitate the value creation process. Metallo, Agrifoglio, Schiavone, & Mueller (2018) applied the BMC framework to explore the business model of three companies, analysing the key partners, key resources and key activities, which they argue are the most important elements of the BMC. In the BMC approach, the town or small city is seen as the focal organisation, linked with a variety of different partners, activities and resources which contribute towards to the economic value of any event tourism offer. In the UK, the focal organisation may be the local government (borough or metropolitan council) or a Business Improvement District. The BMC allows us to examine different configurations of event networks to understand which event resources and capabilities generate value (Miller, Eisenstat, & Foote, 2002).

<<< Figure 1 about here >>>

### **Case Study - Sheffield**

Little is currently known about how towns and smaller cities can draw economic value from their networks, so an exploratory approach was both rational and logical. Given the exploratory nature of the research, an initial case study was undertaken with the city of Sheffield, in the UK, in order to understand how some of the key terms and challenges identified in the literature relate to practical considerations for economic value creation. The case study included background research from secondary sources such as websites as well as an hour-long semi structured interview with Richard Eyre, the City Centre Manager and head of the city events team from Sheffield City Council (SCC). The findings of this case study informed and guided the development of the quantitative survey tool.

#### ***Sheffield, 'City on the Move'***

Sheffield is a post-industrial city located in the North of England in the United Kingdom. The city had a population of 575,400 as of mid-2016 (Sheffield City Council, n.d.). During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century it developed a strong reputation for its steel production, earning itself the nickname 'Steel City'. In 1970 an infamous publicity film entitled 'City on the move' highlighted a 'boom and bust' era before its steel industry began to decline (BBC, 2008). Since then it has attempted to reinvent itself as an event city, particularly with the World Student Games (or Summer Universiade) in 1991 which brought urban regeneration and several major event venues (Sheffield City Council, n.d.).

As the local government, SCC employ a team of event managers to handle a range of different events, from community driven initiatives right through to bidding for major sports events. According to the head of the SCC major events team, day visitor numbers to the city are

very low due to a lack of traditional tourism attractions, so the city has used events as a “trojan horse” to boost visitor spending. Major events which are designed and delivered by SCC, or those events which they bid for, are graded against three economic criteria; “pounds, profile and people” (R. Eyre, personal communication, May 18, 2018). Broadly these were explained as “Does the event bring income into the city, does the event raise the profile of the city and does the event bring people to the city?” It was acknowledged that some events do not always meet all three criteria.

In terms of their local network, “Community events make up an around 60-70% of all events in the city” (R. Eyre, personal communication, May 18, 2018). The SCC major events team support these community networks with mainly intangible resources like advice, marketing support or safety oversight. They do provide some tangible resources, but mainly in the form of space to host events. SCC stated that there is no formal process for identifying those community-led events which have the potential for tourism income, with little or no impact economic analysis completed at this level. There are many social outcomes from events at this level, but the city would welcome insight into how these events could be nurtured into “future stars” for generating economic value. Some events have progressed from the community level into events that attract tourists, although SCC acknowledged this was not by design. There was a clear need to understand this process in more detail to be able to draw on economic value created from their networks.

Recognition by SCC of its role as a facilitator was clear, the need to act as a hub that connects different partners, activities and resources was important, particularly for community events. While the city does have a major events strategy in place, this does not cover community events. SCC recognises that it does not have all the resources or capacity to support each event

and relies on the creativity of local entrepreneurs to generate value. “SCC recognises that it should partner and use the creativity and skill of the local promoters rather than attempting a venture alone” (R. Eyre, personal communication, May 18, 2018).

This preliminary case study highlighted several key areas to focus on in the quantitative survey of event managers. Clearly seeking respondents’ views of how local partners can create value was key. There is also a need to distinguish between tangible and intangible resources, as the ability of a local government to support or provide these varies. Finally, the survey should assess if the respondents saw their role as facilitating bottom-up value creation rather than simply offering a top-down approach, and how this related to the presence of a formal event tourism strategy.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Using the information gleaned from the case study, and drawing on existing literature, the following research questions were constructed to guide the research. These are based on the key partners, key activities and key resources from the value creating side of the BMC by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010). They are aligned with the appropriate economic value in an event tourism context as shown in Figure 2. In the case of key resources, this was split into tangible and intangible resources based on the work of Vargo & Lusch (2016).

<<< Figure 2 about here >>>

**Q1 – KEY PARTNERS**, does a higher level of stakeholder contribution lead to a higher level of economic benefit (value created) from events?

**Q2 – KEY ACTIVITIES**, does actively encouraging networks to create events lead to a higher level of economic benefit (value created) from events?

**Q3 – KEY RESOURCES**, does providing more tangible support resources to networks lead to a higher level of economic benefit (value created) from events?

**Q4 – KEY RESOURCES**, does providing more intangible support resources to networks lead to a higher level of economic benefit (value created) from events?

**Q5 - VALUE PROPOSITION**, does the presence of a written event strategy lead to a higher level of economic benefit (value created) from events?

## METHODOLOGY

An exploratory sequential design (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Jick, 1979) was used for this study. This method allows qualitative data to be collected first to explore any phenomenon before quantitative data are collected to explain the relationships found in the qualitative data. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods can offset the weaknesses of each approach and enhance the validity of the results (Jick, 1979).

Following a review of the literature and the case study, a draft survey was created using the Qualtrics online tool. This was then sent as a pilot survey to 10 participants which led to slight modifications of the questions to aid readability and clarification to lessen non-response. The final survey consisted of 25 questions and was related to the value creation side of the BMC parameters (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010). 5-point Likert response scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5) (Likert, 1932) questions were adapted to collect attitudes of respondents on the key resources, key partners, key activities and value proposition of event tourism in their town or city.

### Sampling

Purposive sampling was undertaken given the specific focus of the sample and themes. It is often used in exploratory research as it enables the recruitment of respondents from specific



groups of a population (Saunders et al., 2016). The authors were granted access to the ATCM annual conference where data collection was undertaken using tablets to record responses. As there was not full attendance at the conference an email link was sent to non-attending members afterwards to complete the survey tool. It should be noted that not all ATCM members have any responsibility for events. This number is unknown by the ATCM and so it was not possible to filter out those recipients. When sampling in person and via email it was made clear this survey should only be completed by someone with some responsibility for events. This was important to prevent the questionnaire been completed by respondent who do not fit the research sample.

Microsoft SPSS version 24 was used for data analysis. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the relevance of the differences observed in the mean comparison. To control Type 1 error rate, the Games-Howell procedure was used for the post hoc test (Field, 2009).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In total 112 surveys were completed by ATCM members, which represented 45% of the total population. 100% of the responses given contained usable data.

As presented in Table 1, the town or city population sizes ranged mainly from 25,000 to 149,000 (59%), and 52% were Regional, Local or Parish Governments. 55% of the respondents work for a town or city with a population of less than 100,000, and most (71.4%) were employed on a full-time basis. A majority of ATCM members (52%) do not have current strategy or policy for events. Of the respondents, 71% ( $n = 80$ ) described the role of the lead person for events as being in full-time paid employment, 26% ( $n = 29$ ) as part-time paid employees and 2% as unpaid volunteers. However with regards to the proportion of their role dedicated to supporting event programmes in their town or city, the highest percentage of respondents fell in the 0-24%

category (30%), whilst 28% fell within the 75-100% category, followed by 23% in the 50-74% category and 18% fell within the 25-49% category.

<<< Table 1 about here >>>

A series of one-way ANOVAs were performed in which the differences between groups for the BMC parameters were explored. Table 2 illustrates the test results of the analysis of variance between groups of the business model parameters. The independent variables: key activities, key resources, key partners and value propositions were each analysed to measure their relationship to the perceived economic value of the event tourism programme. Respondents were asked to indicate what percentage of their total events programme relates to generating economic value. This was used as the main metric by which to compare the variables from the BMC.

### ***Key Partners***

Table 2 displays the findings from the independent samples, *t*-tests and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA). These tests were conducted to explore the impact of each of the key partners on the event tourism of the towns and cities, in terms of the perceived economic value generated. For Q1, key partners, the results indicate no significant relationship between the level of stakeholder involvement and perceived economic value at a significance level of  $p > .05$ .

<<< Table 2 about here >>>

This suggests that towns and smaller cities are not able to extract higher value from increased inputs from the stakeholder network. This connects to the interview with SCC, who suggested that although they offer some event support to partners, they have no formal mechanisms for spotting which events might be a 'future star' that can add value. Given the size of Sheffield and the small team of staff that is in place, this suggests that towns and smaller cities with less resources are also unable to extract value from this part of their network.

While there was no significant relationship found between stakeholder contribution and economic value, it could be argued that value creation means different things to different towns and smaller cities. Value could be perceived to be created in other ways (e.g., social or cultural), blurring the lines of economic value creation (Taks et al., 2015; Wallstam et al., 2018; Wood, 2009). This suggests that non-economic outcomes may play a more important role in the decision making relating to events in towns and smaller cities.

### ***Key Activities***

Respondents were asked if they have a process for actively encouraging local stakeholders to undertake activities which contribute to their event tourism offer. The results in Table 2 (Q2) show a significant positive relationship between activities undertaken to encouragement the events network and the perceived economic value derived from events ( $F = 6.48$  at  $p < .001$ ). Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD and Games-Howell tests also show significant differences in perceived economic value created according to the level of encouragement for creating and running events. This underlines the importance of a process or activities for engagement between the focal node and the network. Towns and smaller cities that are willing to engage and encourage their network through a process to encourage events reap greater benefit in terms of perceived economic value created. Comparing these results with the work of Prebensen (2010) who looked at value creation in a single event, the findings support the suggestion that the formation of interorganizational linkages is key to securing economic outcomes. Given that less than 30% of respondents reported that events make up 75% or more of their role (Table 1) it is perhaps the case that they have less time to spend on the process or activity of encouraging the network for perceived economic value gain.

### ***Key Resources***

Levels of key resources in terms of both tangible ( $p=.289$ ) and intangible resources ( $p=.965$ ) contributed by the network were found not to have a significant influence on perceived economic value creation. This suggests that resources given to support their event network by the focal node does not increase the perceived economic value generated from the network and that respondents did not identify clear links between resources in their network and the perceived economic value created. This may indicate that they felt low economic value was returned from the network relative to the input of tangible and intangible resources by the city.

The absence of a link between perceived economic return and tangible resources like money or physical event elements is surprising. Fewer cities were able to offer tangible resources, which probably relates to the financial austerity of the past decade in the UK. However, providing tangible resources does not appear to be a pre-requisite for generating higher economic value from events.

### ***Event Strategy***

Table 3 shows the breakdown of towns and smaller cities by population and the presence of an events strategy. There was no significant relationship between the presence of a written event strategy and higher perceived economic value being drawn from networks ( $p=.336$ ). Cities of different population sizes have strategies, but less than 50% of the total identified having a written strategy in place. This aligns with the argument of Getz (2008) about bottom-up event tourism, who suggests the process is not prevalent amongst governing agencies. If the value creation is generally top-down, then it is not surprising that most respondents do not have a written event strategy supporting bottom-up value creation. The lack of recognition by the town or city of bottom-up value creation processes arguably limits the generation of perceived

economic benefits through the network. The business model approach (Zott et al., 2011) advocates a more network-based value creation strategy, something that the towns and small cities in this study did not display.

<<< Table 3 about here >>>

The results from both SCC and the survey data seem to confirm the analysis of Pugh & Wood (2004), who found a lack of strategic planning by cities to make effective use of events. The survey results suggest that towns and smaller cities are not able to capitalise on the value of their event networks, perhaps because event network value partners do not play an important part in the designing of the business model. One reason for this might be that less than 30% of respondents reported having a significant event focus in their role (75%-100% of their time), suggesting that finding the time to engage with their networks is difficult. Zott et al. (2011) emphasise the key role of the focal organisation as a value-creating actor, who in the case of towns and small cities is unable to effectively facilitate value creation due to their own limited resources.

## CONCLUSIONS

The use of event tourism is becoming increasingly important for towns and small city practitioners seeking an alternative way to add value (Getz, 2017) and this exploratory study looked at the flow of economic value into a focal event tourism organisation from its network. The aim of this study was to explore how networks support perceived economic value creation for event tourism, using the business model canvas as a lens.

The value creating side of the BMC helped us to frame this study using five research questions; key partners, key activities, key tangible resources, key intangible resources and value proposition. Of the five research questions proposed, only key activities were found to have a

significant influence on the perceived economic benefit created. The other four factors had no significant effect on the level of perceived economic value created by events.

The findings show that if the focal node (town or city government organisation) increases key activities to engage their event network, then economic value is created through their network. In reality this means that a town or city has a role to play in coordinating or leading the engagement or process within a network of stakeholders in order to gain economic value from the outcomes. This supports the view of Ziakas (2018) who suggests that 'an integrative mindset to envision synergies, exploit community assets and coordinate stakeholders' is needed for event leveraging. Interestingly the presence of an events strategy doesn't appear to influence the economic value gained, despite the requirement of a process or activity. This suggests many of the respondents operate relationships with their event network either without any strategy or on an informal basis. Given that few respondents had events forming 75-100% of their jobs (<30%) some may find time a contributing factor in managing or maintaining processes for their network.

This exploratory study points to several potential areas for future research. In particular, it is important to consider the different components of the activity or process used by the focal node (highlighted as key activities in this study) and how they may vary across different towns and cities. This would likely require qualitative detail (through interviews or focus groups) to understand the similarities and differences of each process. Towns and smaller cities are difficult places to manage, with limited resources available to support activities like events, so it would also be interesting to consider if there is any minimum threshold of resourcing that enables cities to mobilise their value creating networks given that there was no significance found between the key resources and perceived economic benefit. Such research could also be important in terms of

discussions related to the need for centralised event units in towns or cities. Dredge and Whitford (2011) also discuss the commitment required by governments to create a discursive public sphere which allows for relationship building (within a network). Our results underline the fact that towns and smaller cities are less likely to be able to facilitate such a space for dialogue, and so may benefit less from their networks.

There were several limitations to this study, particularly as the data collected came from only one part of the value network, namely the focal organisation (town or city government organisations). Data collection should be widened in future research to include other actors in the value creating network such as private and voluntary sector stakeholders, to more fully understand the key activities or process that creates perceived economic value. The survey scope was also limited to one organisation (the ATCM), which does not represent the entire population of towns and smaller cities in the UK. Finally, the study did not take into consideration the value consumption side of the business model canvas, which describes how the value created by event networks is then consumed (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

From a practitioner perspective this study offers a key takeaway. There is a significant positive relationship between the level of event-related activity undertaken by the focal organisation and the amount of network value created. This suggests that the towns or cities need to employ an active strategy of engagement with their networks to reap rewards, which requires a significant investment of time and resources. The lack of a direct link between resources (tangible and intangible) and economic return leaves open questions about the type of strategy towns and cities need to employ. Future research on these relationships could significantly benefit practitioners in local government organisations, who face increasing challenges in

leading value creation initiatives, given their own diminishing resources (Turok, 2009) in creating value.

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Table 1.

Descriptive statistics for sample responses

Attribute	Characteristics	<i>n</i> (%)
<b>Population of city or town</b>		
	0-9,999	5 (4.5%)
	10,000-24,999	14 (12.5%)
	25,000-49,999	23 (20.5%)
	50,000-99,999	20 (17.9%)
	100,000-149,999	23 (20.5%)
	150,000-499,999	19 (17.0%)
	500,000+	7 (6.3%)
<b>Organisation type</b>		
	Business Improvement District	45 (40.2%)
	Regional, Local or Parish Government	58 (51.8%)
	Destination Marketing Organisation	3 (2.7%)
	Event Bidding Organisation	2 (1.8%)
	Other	3 (2.7%)
<b>Employment type</b>		
	Volunteer (unpaid)	2 (1.8%)
	Part time (paid)	29 (25.9%)
	Full time (paid)	80 (71.4%)
<b>% of role supporting events</b>		
	0 – 24%	34 (30.4%)
	25 – 49%	20 (17.9%)
	50 – 74%	26 (23.2%)

75 – 100%	31 (27.7%)
<b>Has strategy in place for events</b>	
Yes	51 (45.5%)
No	43 (38.4%)
Not sure	15 (13.4%)

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Table 2.

Research Question Results: Business model parameters relationship with economic benefit factors

<b>BM parameters</b>	<b>Mean square within groups</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.<sup>a</sup></b>
<b>BM key partners (Q1)</b>				
Event attendees	105.44	4	.213	p=.931
Local Commercial Venues (e.g. live music / theatre)	482.52	4	1.042	p=.390
Local Businesses (e.g. restaurants)	628.24	4	1.435	p=.229
Local or Parish Government	233.01	4	.493	p=.741
Entertainers or artistes	114.54	4	.235	p=.918
Local Community Groups (e.g. sports or culture)	576.21	4	1.259	p=.292
Destination Marketing Organisation (e.g. tourism board)	747.87	4	1.646	p=.169
Suppliers to Events (e.g. staging)	551.84	4	1.200	p=.316
Local Residents (unrelated to any event)	690.63	4	1.496	p=.210
Regulators (e.g. Health & Safety)	570.36	4	1.222	p=.307
<b>BM key activities (Q2)</b>				
Process to encourage network	2544.30	4	6.484***	p<.001
<b>BM Key resources</b>				
Tangible resources (Q4)	580.57	4	1.269	p=.289
Intangible resources (Q5)	43.29	3	.091	p=.965
<b>BM value proposition (Q6)</b>	504.34	2	1.103	p=.336

Notes: Results obtained from independent samples *t*-test and one-way ANOVA with Tukey post-hoc multiple comparison tests. \*\*\*Significant at  $p < .001$ .; <sup>a</sup> Probability at one tail.

Table 3.

Presence of a strategy for events by city population size

	Yes		No		Not sure		Total	
<b>Population</b>	51		43		15		109	
0-9,999 people	1	2.0%	3	7.0%	1	6.7%	5	4.6%
10,000-24,999 people	2	3.9%	10	23.3%	2	13.3%	14	12.8%
25,000-49,999 people	8	15.7%	11	25.6%	4	26.7%	23	21.1%
50,000-99,999 people	11	21.6%	7	16.3%	2	13.3%	20	18.3%
100,000-149,999 people	14	27.5%	8	18.6%	0	0.0%	22	20.2%
150,000-499,999 people	11	21.6%	4	9.3%	3	20.0%	18	16.5%
500,000+ people	4	7.8%	0	0.0%	3	20.0%	7	6.4%



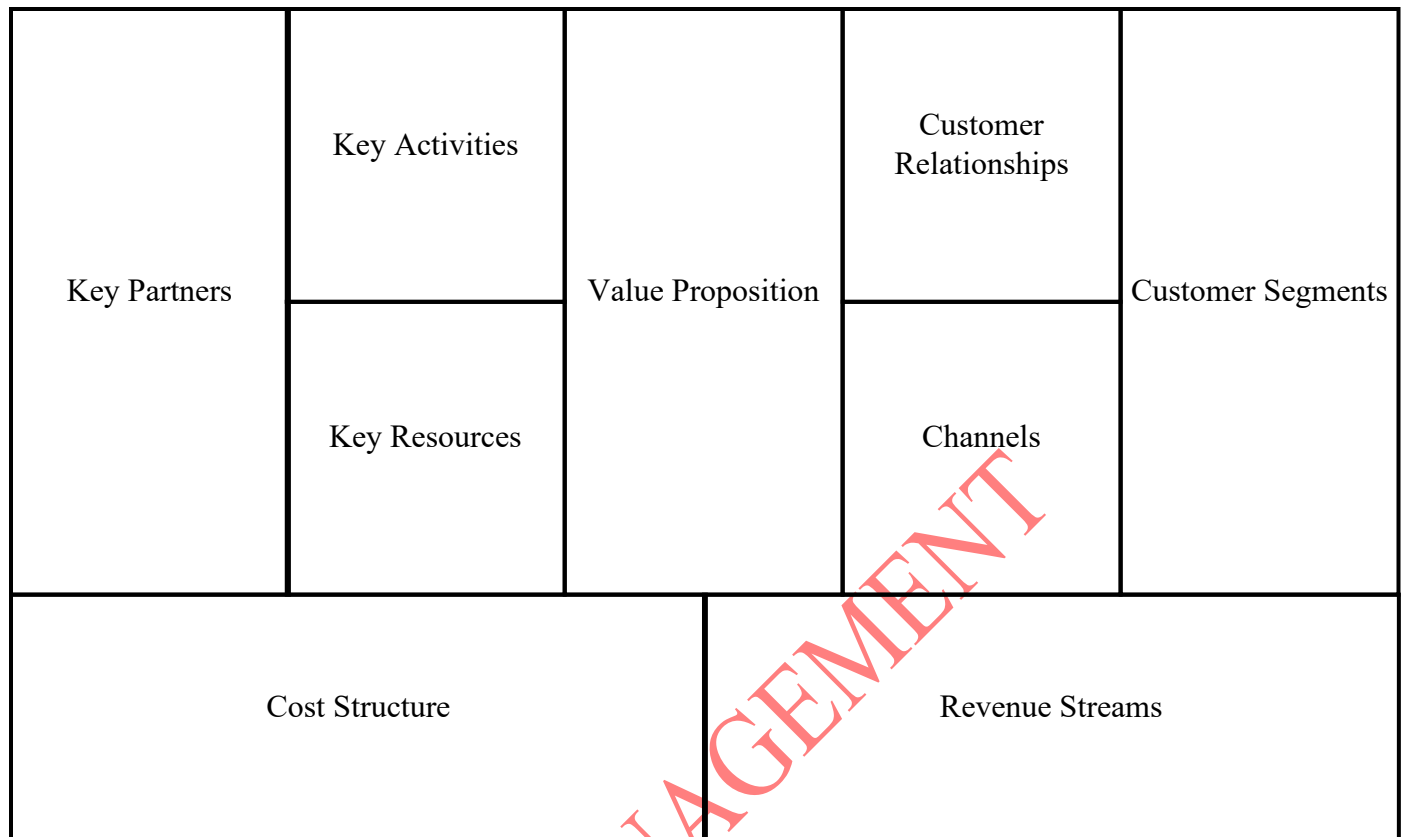


Figure 1. The Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010)

<b>BMC Component</b>	<b>Event Tourism Component in the network</b>	<b>Related Articles (alphabetical order)</b>
Key Partners	NETWORK PARTNERS – the event tourism stakeholders in the network who help create value.	Andersson & Getz, 2008; Bornhorst, Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2010; Bostock, Cooper, & Roberts, 2016; Freeman, 1984; Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & De Colle, 2010; Getz & Andersson, 2010; Jepson & Clarke, 2013; Richards & Rotariu, 2015; Sautter & Leisen, 1999; Simons & Groot, 2015; Stokes, 2006; Tiew, Holmes, & Bussy, 2015; Todd, Leask, & Ensor, 2017; Van Niekerk & Getz, 2019; Zehrer & Hallmann, 2015
Key Activities	NETWORK ACTIVITIES - what activities the town or city undertakes to facilitates the value via partners and resources	Christie & Gibb, 2015; Richards, 2011; Richards, 2017a; Richards & Colombo, 2017a; Richards & Palmer, 2010; Van Niekerk, 2014
Key Resources	NETWORK RESOURCES - local event tourism resources required to create the value via partners and activities. Tangible and Intangible	Cabiddu et al., 2013; Dickson et al., 2017; Hede & Stokes, 2009; Larson, 2009; 2017; Richards & Colombo, 2017a; Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Ziakas, 2013; Ziakas & Trendafilova, 2018
Value Proposition	NETWORK VALUE PROPOSITION –Combined offer from events tourism network that creates economic value	Andersson & Getz, 2008; Bornhorst et al., 2010; Bostock et al., 2016; Freeman, 1984; Freeman, 2004; Freeman et al., 2010; Getz & Andersson, 2010; Jepson & Clarke, 2013; Richards & Rotariu, 2015; Sautter & Leisen, 1999; Simons & Groot, 2015; Stokes, 2006; Busy et al., 2015; Todd et al., 2017; Van Niekerk & Getz, 2019; Zehrer & Hallmann, 2015

Figure 2. The Business Model Canvas mapped to relevant event tourism component with salient literature.